Trees of the Ages

Laura Nyro Live in Japan

omnivore® RECORDINGS

1. Dedicated to the One I Love
2. Ooh Baby Baby
3. A Woman of the World
4. Louise's Church
5. Lite a Flame (The Animal Rights Song)
6. Walk the Dog & Light the Light (Song of the Road)
7. The Japanese Restaurant Song
8. And When I Die
9. To a Child
10. The Descent of Luna Rosé
11. Wild World
12. Save the Country
13. Wedding Bell Blues
14. Trees of the Ages / Emmie
15. Walk on By
16. Let It Be Me
17. Oh Yeah Maybe Baby (The Heebie Jeebies)
18. Wind
19. Broken Rainbow
20. My Innocence / Sophia
21. Art of Love

Reissue Produced for Release by
Cheryl Pawelski and George Gilbert

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Black Hair shrouds her pale face like the night sky swallowing the moon.

Her lips stained with bittersweet grapevine poems that beckon and seduce, as her moonbeam fingers, long and silvery do a slow float over ivory piano keys, finding, fondling warm chords that resonate in heart chambers from Osaka to the Bronx. A melancholy architect who, since the age of five, built a world of music, that she laid stone by stone, a yellow-brick sidewalk that zigzagged to her own private Oz, where Judy Garland and Claude Debussy shared a picnic in the eternal poppy fields, below a "Broken Rainbow." Laura, the Earth Mother, tossed her sonic summer salad of gospel and jazz, with croutons of doo wop, and a zesty dressing of giddy Broadway musical motifs. Brown earth tones that gently cradled words, that can't be expressed, no matter how playful and graceful, without the embrace of melody. Eyes distant gazing, lost in thought, listening to something nobody else can hear, like having a conversation with the divine. A woman of the "Wild World," Laura was never one to color between the lines. Known to drive her sidemen to the brink with tempos that shifted with her every mood. Each song, a prayer . . . brief and fleeting meditations, as time hangs suspended in the moments between the last fading notes and the applause that falls like snowflakes on a hot cast iron stove. The Japanese audience so careful and polite, hoping not to break the gossamer spell she wove with the sharp clapping of hands. Harmonies pour from the three Dianes (only Laura Nyro could have a choir of Dianas) echo her every word and emotion. "Diana," a name traditionally associated with the Roman goddess of fertility, hunting and childbirth, that translates to "luminous," "divine," "fertile," and "perfect." As her piano pulses, she namechecks the lyre strumming poetess, Sappho, the "Tenth Muse," who lived and died on the island of Lesbos. "Louise's Church" is dedicated to the chic Russian sculptor Louise Nevelson, the tragic jazz diva Billie Holiday, and Frida Kahlo, who painted her autobiography in brilliant hues.

You can learn a lot from just one of Nyro's songs. Which led me to do a bit more research beyond the usual stuff like her baby boomer birthdate: the 18th of October 1947 (just barely two years after the war finally ended) and what her papa Louis Nigro (yes, she changed her name) did for a living—blowing jazz trumpet and tuning pianos. According to my Wicca sister Conleth, from St. Paul, Minnesota, "the moon, on February 22, 1994, (the date of this recording) was in Cancer, at 17°, in the phase known as Waxing Gibbous—a time for manifesting deep emotion, and a sense of belonging in the world. But being in Cancer, the stomach, lymph system and sexual/reproductive organs were particularly more sensitive and needed extra care."

We human beings are constantly faced with forces both unknown and beyond our control, often feeling like the star of a movie we didnít write, and are clearly not directing, yet always wondering when and how it will end. Lauraís gentle reading of "And When I Die" takes on a deeper significance here, knowing, as we do now, that she would soon be gone and ðone child [will be] born and the world will carry on . . ."

Like her mother, Gilda, the bookkeeper, Laura too, was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in the winter of 1996. With the spring of the following year, she was gone at 49, the same age her mom. Her ashes were then scattered beneath "The Tree of Ages," at her home in Danbury, Connecticut.

Everything about Laura Nyro spelled drama, from the way she tossed her head back as she belt out her lonely moon siren songs that poured from her throat, sculpting the air in Van Gogh curves that swirled and continue to undulate like waves of wind, as beads of sweat sparkled on her forehead, and ran down her neck like tears of moonlight, bursting and flowing down the cheeks of those who need her (still), think they know her, bought a piece of her soul for $6.95 at Sam Goody's, and listen repeatedly to her voice igniting joy and beckoning them through the dark night of the soul. And although unpredictable, she was never acting! The dark-eyed gypsy Madonna lights another cigarette in her candlelit womb. The rituals she regularly performed to keep herself from drowning in an undertow of emotion, became a life saver, tossed to thousands of others around the world, in quiet distress. Although they might not show it, waiting in line to get in to see her, below the surface of their anticipating faces, down in the flat fish territory of their souls, lies a suitcase of sorrow, that freight of destiny we all lug around, until it finally, effortlessly slips off our back, one halleluiah morning.

In these (and those) sad/mad times, there remains the eternal hope that a song might still rescue us. "Save the Country!" "It's Gonna Take a Miracle" . . . yes, indeed. Concerned about the fate of our planet, our environment, humanity, and animals, Laura Nyro became a vegetarian and animal rights activist, joined the peace movement, the women's movement, and the movement of the soul, stirred by rock 'n' roll, and R&B. Nyro knew music was the healing force of the universe, generously offering "an invitation across the nation" and a chance to dance in the street. She smiled in the face of adversity, while flagging down "The Poverty Train," tackling problems of racism and sexism, that we already confronted (and foolishly thought we solved) with the struggles and protests of the '50s, '60s, and '70s.

Itís late now. The windows are opaque with night. The moon, distant and high in the sky. Its pale face shrouded by another storm of raven-black hair, as Laura sings her "Luna Rose'" songs that reverberate through the walls of time, back to when she sat, alive at the piano in Osaka, clad in a silky kimono and tabi (split-toed) boots, punctuating the end of each offering with a gentle "arigato" (thank you).

Time keeps spinning and flashing by like the carnival rides she once took, while laughing boys back in her broody teenage Bronx days, stood like awkward flowers, watching, joking, smoking, flicking cigarettes butts onto oily, rain-puddled streets, as she sang . . . "It can never be the way we want it to be . . ." No . . . I guess not, but we still have the music.

—John Kruth
April, 2021

1. **Dedicated to the One I Love**
(Lowman Pauling/Ralph Bass)
2. **Ooh Baby Baby**
(William Robinson/Warren Moore)
3. **A Woman of the World**
4. **Louise's Church**
5. **Lite a Flame (The Animal Rights Song)**
6. **Walk the Dog & Light the Light (Song of the Road)**
7. **The Japanese Restaurant Song**
8. **And When I Die**
9. **To a Child**
10. **The Descent of Luna Rosé**
11. **Wild World**
12. **Save the Country**
13. **Wedding Bell Blues**
14. **Trees of the Ages / Emmie**
15. **Walk on By**
(Burt Bacharach/Hal David)
16. **Let It Be Me**
(Gilbert Bécaud/Pierre Delanoë/Manny Curtis)
17. **Oh Yeah Maybe Baby (The Heebie Jeebies)**
(Phil Spector/Hank Hunter)
18. **Wind**
(Nolan Strong/Quenten Eubank/
Willie Hunter/Juan Guiterriez/Bob Edwards)
19. **Broken Rainbow**
20. **My Innocence / Sophia**
21. **Art of Love**

All songs written by Laura Nyro
except where noted

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Laura Nyro
vocal, piano, harmony arrangements

Harmony Group
Diane Wilson, Dian Sorrell, Diane Garisto

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In memory of Michele Kort